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Marital Interaction in Intercultural Marriage:
An Application of Expectancy Violation Theory

Ni Duan and Glenda Claborne

University of Arizona

Abstract

This paper analyzes marital selection, marital conflict, marital interaction and marital outcome in intercultural marriages using the premises and framework of Expectancy Violations Theory. A definition of intercultural marriage is given relative to other terms used in previous studies to describe the marriage between two people from different backgrounds. A brief summary of some previous research on intercultural marriage is added to give background information on the social factors impinging on intercultural marriages. Marrying across markedly different cultural lines is proposed to be a highly negative violation of the norm of endogamy found in most societies. This negative violation is posited to cause stress in the intercultural marriage. It is suggested that marital conflict can be reduced by achievement of consistency between intercultural couples. Marital interaction is inferred to be mediated by the intercultural couple's frameworks of reference regarding their similarities and differences, expectancies and attribution processes. Marital outcomes depend on the valence of the established pattern of marital interaction. Expectancy violations are surmised to perform different functions at an early and latter stage of the intercultural marriage.

Introduction

Intercultural marriage -- the marriage between individuals from different cultural backgrounds -- seems to offer a naturally occurring context for the integrated study of intimate relationships and cultural variations. Cultural variations in communicative practices have been important variables in the study of human communication, however, they were usually placed in the background when it comes to personal relationships (Gaines, 1995), because the consideration of culture tends to bring out the tension between the specific and the universal. The fact that there is considerable cultural diversity in communicative practices has caused philosophical debates over whether communication scholars should or will ever come up with general, universal laws governing human communication.

However, there is now an increasing trend in the study of culture and communication to view culture as diverse but having universal foundations. In his analysis of culture, meaning, and interpersonal communication, Streeck (1994) draws from diverse disciplines to demonstrate that cultural variations in human behavior, language, personality, and conceptions of meaning have evolutionary universal foundations. Streeck (1994) argues that interpersonal communication practices as well as any other cultural achievement are "always local and generic, specific and universal at the same time" (p. 312). In line with this dual view of culture and communication, this paper takes the phenomenon of marital interaction in intercultural marriages to be both specific and universal.

There are two reasons why intercultural marriages share with all other marriages some universal, general or generic characteristics. First, in a sense, all marriages are

intermarriages because no two individuals share exactly parallel background experiences (Falicov, 1986). Therefore, intercultural couples have to strive for mutual accommodation as any couple strives for marital satisfaction. Second, intercultural couples share the same basic human needs for affection, support, trust and respect for and from each other as any other married couple. At some level then, intercultural marital interaction shares the same trajectories towards marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction as any couple.

Not only should we view intercultural marriages as both having specific and universal characteristics, but also that it has an intergroup as well as an interpersonal dimension. The intergroup dimension contributes to the cultural specificity of the intercultural interaction while the interpersonal dimension embraces the universal needs of warmth, affection and trust. In general, intercultural marital interaction would differ from homogamous marital interaction in two ways. First, communication would be more complicated because different cultures have different expectations about behavior and interaction based on social norms, rules, and styles. Second, because of complications in interpersonal communication, the process in which expectation consistency and violation derived from accommodation and acculturation are achieved would be more complicated.

Because terms associated with culture gets confounded with concepts of race, ethnicity, class, etc., we will start with a clarification of the term we choose to use in comparison with other terms used to label the same phenomenon of marriages between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Background information will be provided by way of a brief run through some of the previous research done on interracial and interethnic marriages. There are few studies of these marriages in communication so

the research in other disciplines may further inform us of the direction of more communication studies on the subject. The next two sections will focus on the communication aspect of intercultural marriages using the premises of Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory as a framework of analysis. The first section of this part will discuss mate selection in intercultural marriages. The second section will focus on the development of marital interaction towards stability or dissolution as a function of expectancy violations, confirmation, and attributional sets, the view an intercultural couple chooses to screen their similarities and differences,.

A Definition of Intercultural Marriage

Overall and Specific Terms

A number of terms describe the various aspects and levels of intercultural marriages. Intercultural marriage is the overall term. We have defined an intercultural marriage at the beginning of this paper as simply the marriage between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In its most general sense, this encompasses those marriages in which partners have different cultural backgrounds. More precisely, intercultural marriage is marriage in which communication between partners whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.

Like any concept or phenomenon that involves cultural differences, the concepts of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and class inevitably define what constitute an individual's cultural background. Gaines, Buriel, Liu and Rios (1997) use the term "interethnic" and "interracial" interchangeably. However, they acknowledge research which has pointed out that racial groups do not constitute ethnic groups per se (Crohn,

1995) but that race is part and parcel of ethnicity (Gaines, 1995b). Furthermore, Gaines & Ickes (1997) note that interreligious and international relationships (seen as examples of interethnic relationships) often involve individuals who are socially categorized as belonging to the same race. Interracial marriage occurs when both partners are from different races. The term race pertains to physical characteristics, such as color of skin, contour of head, shape of eyes, texture of hair, and the like. These physical differences frequently do influence communication. On the other hand, interracial marriage may not be intercultural. For instance, if a third-generation Asian American whose family has been thoroughly assimilated into American culture is married to a white American, their marriage would be interracial, but hardly intercultural (Samovar & Porter, 1995).

Falicov (1986) uses the term "intercultural marriage" to be synonymous with the terms "intermarriage" and "cross-cultural" to "encompass those marriages between partners of diverse ethnicity, religion, social class, race or nationality" (p. 429). She goes further to make distinctions between marriages involving these variables based on their demographic frequency. It is pointed out that interethnic marriages are the most common, followed by interfaith or interreligious marriages. Interracial marriages are least frequent and interclass marriages are the rarest (Leslie, 1982; Schulz, 1976).

Constitution of Cultural Heritage

It seems clear from the examples of terms used to label marriages between persons from diverse cultural backgrounds that race, ethnicity, religion, nationality and class contribute to what constitute an individual's cultural heritage. We cannot uncouple the definition of an intercultural marriage from ethnicity, identity and group as Streeck (1994) seeks to do in explicating the evolutionary nature of culture. However, like

Streeck (1994), we reject the territorial view of culture, which sees culture as belonging to particular groups and bounded within physical territories. Rather, we recognize the overlapping, shifting movements of cultures across time and space. When it comes to marriage, the variables of race, ethnicity, religion and class become salient in differing degrees in defining the cultural backgrounds of each spouse in an intercultural marriage.

Geographic Location

Sometimes, the salience of a particular variable depends on the geographic location. Religion would be a salient factor in defining an intercultural marriage in Northern Ireland (Protestant-Catholic) or India (Hindu-Muslim) whereas religious differences do not matter as strongly in the U.S. or in the U.K. Race is a salient factor in defining an intercultural marriage in the U.S. and South Africa whereas in South Korea, race is mixed in subtle degrees with other concerns. In highly hierarchical societies such as India, caste or class would be a salient factor.

While culture may be defined broadly as including all mental representations and material artifacts that a group uses to define its identity, we use differences in macro-social variables of race, ethnicity, religion and class to define what constitutes an intercultural marriage.

Intercultural Marriage as Social Phenomenon

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of the porousness and flexibility of cultural boundaries are intercultural marriages between individuals from different races, religions, and class. As a social phenomenon, the study of marriages involving individuals from different cultural backgrounds is warranted by the reported increase in these kinds of marriages as migration and immigration increase within and between many countries in

the world. In view of the traditionally strong opposition to marriages across racial, religious and class lines in most societies, the increase in these marriages and the population of children issuing from these marriages pose important implications to demographic categories and social interactions in multi-cultural societies.

The consideration of intercultural marriages as social phenomena is also warranted by the fact that marriage is a most basic social institution. A marriage is more than a relationship between individuals. It is also a relationship between groups. As such, marriage has symbolic meaning generally related to the relative status of the groups involved. Difference in status between groups is often the reason why intercultural marriages are not preferred in most societies. Johnson and Warren (1994) argue that marriage is a relationship that signifies equality and this symbolism of equality is oftentimes threatening to groups that want to maintain the status quo. While these macro-social considerations are important, they only serve as important background for this paper's examination of intercultural marital interaction.

Previous Research on Intercultural Marriage

The literature on interracial and interethnic marriages generally goes back to the strong opposition that most societies have for marriages across racial, ethnic, religious and class lines as expressed in anti-miscegenation laws, and the raw, biological bases of eugenics. Earlier studies of intercultural marriages are mostly sociological and social-psychological in nature, focusing on black-white marriages in the U.S., and look at intercultural marriages in relation to mate selection and in terms of exchange theories.

The interest of most of these studies is largely to find demographic patterns of intermarriages to explain intergroup relations and social changes. Most notable among

sociological studies are Merton's (1941) and Davis' (1941) studies of why endogamy (the tendency to marry within a particular group, caste or class) seems to be the norm in most societies. Merton (1941) and Davis (1941) reason that most societies prefer endogamy because the similarities between marital partners are expected to reduce conflicts of values and to avoid the difficulties in identity that children might face when their parents have different cultural backgrounds. Merton (1941) continues to explain that deviations (e.g., marriage between a lower-class person to an upper-class person) from the norm of endogamy entail some exchange of something extra by the lower-status person to the relationship to compensate for the higher status of the other person.

Some researchers see the analysis of intercultural marital decisions and interaction based on the exchange of relative group status and status-laden resources (e.g. education, occupation) as demeaning these marriages by "impugning purely mercenary motives to the partners" (Johnson & Warren, 1994). Others, however, choose Foa and Foa's Resource Exchange Theory among the many versions of social exchange theory to emphasize the exchange of intangible rewards (i.e. affection and respect) to explain interpersonal relationships among and between ethnic groups (Gaines et al., 1997).

Earlier literature on mixed marriages also emphasized the importance of similarities for marital harmony and expressed pessimism about marriages involving cultural differences. Berman (1968) cites the high divorce rate in intercultural marriages as proof that these marriages involve many obstacles to overcome. Allport (1954) points to the harsh realities of prejudice and discrimination and the tremendous pressure that these put on interracial marriages. A recent analysis of data on interethnic marriages in Hawaii and Australia has shown that marriages that cross ethnic lines are more likely to

end in divorce than intraethnic marriages (Jones, 1996). To some researchers, this is hardly surprising taking intergroup conflict at face value (Gaines & Ickes, 1997) and taking most parents' propensity to steer their children toward mates having similar educational, religious, and racial characteristics (Goode, 1959; Petroni, 1973).

However, the principle of homogamy ("like marries like") was challenged by theories that emphasized need complementarity ("opposites attract and complement each other") (Winch, 1955). Increasingly, researchers studying intermarriages are starting to emphasize the shared cultural inheritances among the nation's minority groups (Flores, 1985); the value in creating new forms of experience and relationships out of the diversity (Keeney, 1983; Fallicov, 1982; Goldner, 1982); and the bottom line of romantic love that forms the basis for all satisfying marriages (Jester, 1982; Gaines and Liu, 1997). Gaines & Liu (1997), borrowing from the humanistic psychological principles of Rogers (1961, 1972), argue that "if we acknowledge that romantic love forms a major part of the socioemotional foundation for marriage in general (Fehr, 1993, 1994), then we would not expect the interpersonal 'rules of the game' to change when we shift from intraethnic to interethnic relationship contexts" (p. 97).

The earlier theories examined above most focus on a couple's ethnic characteristics and try to explain intercultural marriage from sociological and social-psychological perspectives, lacking a deeper and overall understanding of intercultural marriage from both a cognitive and behavioral level. In addition, these theories have not articulated the universal and particular characteristics in intercultural marriage. In order to achieve a better understanding of the development of intimate relation in intercultural marriage, we need a framework that can embrace both intercultural and interpersonal

factors to direct the study of interaction in intercultural marriage.

An Application of Expectancy Violation Theory

Burgoon argues that (1995) “because intercultural interactions typically fall at the heterogeneous end of a homogeneity-heterogeneity continuum, they are prototypical cases of potential expectancy violations” (p. 200). In intercultural marriages, the diverse world perception, beliefs and values based on couples’ different cultural backgrounds produce inconsistent expectancies. This paper proposes that greater understanding of marital interaction in intercultural marriage can be achieved according to the effects of culture's expectancy to marriages of in-group members, positive or negative violations to couples’ expectancies derived from their cultural background to mate selection, and the degree of expectation consistency derived from marital accommodation and couple’s acculturation.

Expectation and Cultural Background

“Expectancy in the communication sense denotes an enduring pattern of anticipated behavior” (Burgoon, 1993, p. 31). Expectancy violation theory claims that expectancy involves socially normative patterns of behavior and personal idea about other’s behavior patterns. It assumes that expectancies comprise both a predictive and a prescriptive component. The predictive component refers to communicative acts that are typical in a given culture and the prescriptive component refers to the degree to which a behavior is regarded as appropriate, desired, or preferred. All cultures have communication expectancies that are the guidelines for human conduct that carry associated anticipations for how others will behave (Burgoon, 1995). At the same time, humans behave according to individual and cultural norm.

Because human's information about and knowledge of external physical and social world are mediated by perceptual process, perception is primary in the study of intercultural communication. While perception takes place inside each individual, it is culture's expectancy that primarily determines the meaning we apply to stimuli that reach us. Culture's expectancy strongly influences human's subjective reality, resulting in direct links among culture's expectancy, individual perception, and behavior. Behavior-how humans react to their perceptions of the universe-is largely a result of their learning and cultural situation. Beliefs and values are the important factors that influence both perception and communication. As humans grow up in a culture, that culture's expectancy, based on beliefs and values, conditions them to believe what it deems to be worthy and true. In addition, belief systems are the basis of values, which furnish standards that permit humans to make individual expectancies about their relationship with self and society.

Cultures are extremely complex and consist of numerous interrelated cultural orientation besides beliefs and values, including attitudes, norms, and material aspects. Since there are many dimensions in which cultures differ, for instance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, formality and informality, time, relationship, context, etc., culture's expectancy for communication behavior also varies in degrees. "Expectancy valences may vary significantly from one culture to the next" (Burgoon, 1995, p. 198). To illustrate, collectivist cultures place more positive value on couple's relation with their origin families than do individualistic cultures. Since self is defined via culture and personality, no two individuals or groups are identical in their beliefs and behaviors, and whatever we characterize about one culture or

culture group must be considered as flexible rather than as rigidly structured. By exposing a large group of people to similar experiences, culture tends to generate similar meanings and similar behaviors, which does not mean, of course, that everyone in a particular culture is exactly the same. Culture affects communication through cultural identification, the degree to which individuals consider themselves to be representatives of a particular culture. Expectations count in explaining how people behave and how they should behave affected by individual's cultural identification are particularly important in determining the individual's communication behavior and interaction with others (Rogers & Sternfatt, 1999). Since each individual has a different degree of identification with his culture and his culture's dominant personality profile, some members from a certain culture will not have the typical characteristics of this culture's dominant personality profile. Therefore, some couples from different cultural background may not hold distinct expectancies based on cultural norm. The degree to which individuals' expectancies differ from each other is determined by his or her identification to the cultural background.

The content and standard of each culture's interactional expectancies vary according to the cultural norm and value system. Expectancy based on other cultural stereotypes may be more negatively perceived than expectancies from similar cultural backgrounds (Burgoon, 1995). Fundamental differences in perception, beliefs, and values of couples and their individual cultural background determine intercultural marriage "prime candidates for colliding expectancies" (Burgoon, 1995, p. 200). Thus, Expectancy Violation Theory serves particularly for the understanding of the interaction in intercultural marriage.

Mate Selection of Intercultural Marriage

In most cultures, intercultural marriage is not a common phenomenon and the frequency of intercultural marriages is much lower than that of homogamous marriage. This fact negatively violates the culture's predictive expectancy for intercultural marriages. Furthermore, theories that focus on the importance of commonality of couples' social and cultural experiences and of similarities for marital compatibility regard intercultural marriages pessimistically. Reiss (1976) argues that one's social and cultural background is a key basis of standard by which one chooses a partner to feel rapport. Therefore, members in a culture will not generally choose intercultural marriage because it negatively violates their culture's prescriptive expectancy for marriages.

An assessment of intermarried couples inevitably includes the extended network of their parents and even friends' reactions to the marriage and the subsequent relationships with the family and friend network. In some cultures, strains to intercultural marriage can come from the disapproval of family, friends, and institutions. Although in Western cultures parents no longer play an overt role in arranging marriages, parental approval of the choice of marital partner one makes is of great psychological importance for most individuals. Often, it is difficult to secure unconflicted extended-family support for intercultural marriage. Racial, religious, or ethnic differences could certainly increase the probability of parental disapproval, particularly in families where continuity over the generations is expected and endogamy is the rule. Families of origin may be quite different in values and rituals. One or the other family may refuse to accept the "cultural outsider." The negative expectancy violation of couples' extended relationship network

negatively affects their response and support to couples' marriage, in turn decrease the couples' marital satisfaction.

Since it is human nature for individuals to seek mates from whom they anticipate acceptance, support, and love, they hold expectancy of marital satisfaction to mate selection. This expectancy for marriage is universal to all cultures. With negative effects exerted by negatively violated culture's expectancies for intercultural marriage, intermarried couples face much more difficulties in marital interaction than homogamous couples. Therefore, what to compensate the weakness of intercultural marriage should be some advantages unique for couples in intercultural marriages. Theories focusing on the importance of differences for individual need fulfillment in a relationship identify a widespread belief that is "opposites attract" and complement each other (Winch, 1955). Cultural differences are mere masks behind which lie the partner's complementary needs. The prerequisite behind the masks of intermarried couple is that the union provides the necessary warmth, love, caring, intimacy, and solidarity all human beings require. " 'It takes two to tango' and consciously or unconsciously a person selects a marriage partner who complements a particular dance step and road in life" (Jester, 1982, p. 115). An intercultural marriage offers unique possibilities for creative and functional matches (Falicov, 1986).

In intercultural marriages, complementary differences may be used to find value in exposure to cultural differences (Falicov, 1982). The integration of the two complementary backgrounds may produce a richer or more satisfying whole than if each had married a person within their own culture, which positively violates individual's marital expectancy. Since positive expectancy violations produce more favorable

outcomes than confirmations (Burgoon, 1993), this integration contributes to intercultural selection of mate. For example, some studies of intercultural marriages between black men and white women point out that such type of marriages largely involve black men of high social status and white women of low status. This is seen as an exchange between black males' high achieved status and white females' ascribed racial caste (Davis, 1941; Merton, 1941). Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1990) assert that "though it is possible for a given black male to meet the earnings' ambition standard (despite the lower earnings of black mates as a group), black women are less likely to meet the currently valued European standards of beauty (for example, long blond hair, blue eyes, thin noses)" (p. 216). It is more advantageous for a white woman to marry a black male of high status rather than a white male of low status, because such a choice positively violates her marital expectancy of husband's earning capacity or ambition in her cultural background. In addition, the rare occurrence of white men marrying black women can be attributed to white males' marital expectancy to wives' physical attractiveness.

In summary, an individual's marital expectancy determines intercultural mate selection and culture's expectancy to marriage affects marital satisfaction. The factors that negatively violate a culture's expectancy to marriages of in-group members lead to difficulties and dissatisfaction in the duration of the intercultural marriage. Furthermore, the factors that positively violate individual's marital expectancy contribute to the selection of mate from different cultural background. In addition, the interaction of these positive and negative factors is considered to affect marital satisfaction during the development of intercultural marriage.

Accommodation and Acculturation in Intercultural Marriage

The factors that attract two people to each other and the pleasure they take in each other are much more likely than conflict to determine whether or not a relationship develops (Christensen & Walczynski). However, once a relationship has been well established, conflict is the most important factor affecting satisfaction in the relationship and ultimately its course. It may be that point where behaviors initially interpreted as quaint are now seen as annoying (Burgoon, 1995) in which case the relationship may be said to be unsatisfying. On the other hand, it could be that point where the initially and charmingly quaint behaviors become part of the general attractiveness or uniqueness of a relational partner according to a couple's mutual expectancies, in which case the relationship may be said to be satisfying. In this section we will argue that the level of marital satisfaction of an intercultural couple is affected by the expectancy consistency and expectancy violations determined by degree of marital accommodation and couple's acculturation.

The degree of couple's expectancy inconsistency determines behavior incompatibility and in turn contributes to marital conflict. In intercultural marriages, the attraction of differences in cultural background may serve more commonly than the attraction of similarities as breeding ground for later expectancy inconsistency and conflict. At the beginning of the development period of intercultural marriages, a couple from contrastive cultures inevitably holds communication expectancies beyond their culturally based assumptions, beliefs, and habitual communication patterns. These culturally based preinteractional factors create expectancies for others' conflict behavior

(Ting-Toomey, 1994). Marital conflict often occurs because of violations of normative culture's expectations in a communication episode.

Many aspects of relationship are influenced by the spouse' individual cultural expectancies, from styles of communication to child rearing values. These different expectations could lead to serious marital conflict (Falicov, 1986). Specifically, the differences in rules governing inclusion and exclusion of others in the marriage and the rules about power and authority particularly organize expectancies about marriage both internally and in relation to extended network (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983). For example, some studies in intercultural marriages highlight the differences in cultural values about marital and family organization. Some cultural (e.g., collectivistic) expectations about marriage emphasize values that maintain contact and continuity with the extended family, while others (e.g., individualistic) have normative expectations that favor more self -development, discontinuity and emotional autonomy from the parental families. These inconsistencies in expectations stemming from different cultural norms about relationships eventually contribute to marital conflict.

Burgoon (1995) notes that over time and with repeated interactions, the bases for intercultural expectancies should shift from stereotypic in-group-out-group distinctions to the particularized relationship between the individuals involved. Toward the mutual goal of marital satisfaction, couples in intercultural marriage experience accommodation and acculturation to arrive at an adaptive and flexible view of cultural differences. This stage permits couples to maintain some individual values, to negotiate conflictual problems, and eventually develop a new cultural code that integrates parts of both cultural streams. Thus, the acculturated couple becomes a mixture of two different cultures. This couple's

marital identification ensures expectation consistency, which contributes to marital harmony.

We use a classification of intercultural couples according to the degree of accommodation and acculturation: balanced and unbalanced couples. In defining balanced and unbalanced intercultural couples, we draw on Falicov's (1986) distinction between a balanced and an unbalanced view of cultural differences in the context of other differences in the intercultural marriage. A balanced intercultural couple has a high degree of accommodation and acculturation, which shows a more complex and balanced view of their cultural differences by situating it in a wider sphere of social networks, values, interests, and goals. They acknowledge basic differences framed by their respective cultures but go beyond narrow cultural frames to seek similarities in other frameworks relevant to their marriage. Thus, a balanced intercultural couple would have more freedom to negotiate, integrate or keep autonomous their cultural differences. On the other hand, unbalanced intercultural couples have an impoverished and unbalanced view of their cultural differences by seeking to maximize (overfocus) or minimize (underfocus) these differences depending on personal and social circumstances affecting their marriage. Furthermore, they are often unaware of their cultural differences until stresses in the marriage bring them out. Accordingly, these two types of couples have different bandwidth of acceptable behaviors in marital interactions.

Expectancy Violation and Attribution Process

This section explores the relationship between attribution processes and expectancy violations in intercultural couples. We explore the role of expectancy violation in establishing attributional sets at the early stages of an intercultural marriage

and the role of attributional sets in defining the valence of expectancy violations in latter stages of the marriage. We argue that expectancy violations and confirmations have important roles in the development and establishment of patterns of marital interaction. First, we draw inferences about the bandwidth of acceptable behaviors for each type of marriage and about the valence of expectancy violations in these contexts. Second, we relate the classification of intercultural couples as either balanced or unbalanced to studies of attribution in distressed and nondistressed married couples. Next, we draw inferences about the patterns of attribution that balanced and unbalanced intercultural couples develop especially with regards to their cultural differences. Finally, we relate established attribution sets and violation valences and make predictions about the stability or dissolution of the two types of intercultural marriage.

We infer from the definition that balanced intercultural couples have a wider bandwidth of expected acceptable behaviors while unbalanced intercultural couples have a narrow bandwidth of expected acceptable behaviors. Burgoon (1995) posits that positively-valenced communicators (balanced couple in our case) have larger bandwidth of expected behavior and "may have to engage in more extreme behaviors before their acts qualify as violations" (p. 205). On the other hand, negatively-valenced communicators (unbalanced couple in our case), tend to commit violations earlier and easier because of the narrower bandwidth of expected behaviors.

Burgoon (1991) points out that "couples who experience positive violations have highest satisfaction, followed by those who perceived their expectations as being fulfilled; individuals who experience negative violations have lowest satisfaction" (p. 44). We argue that the wider bandwidth of acceptable behavior of balanced intercultural

couples leads to more confirmations of expected behavior, which results in a more positive, stable pattern of marital interaction. Furthermore, because of the balanced view of cultural differences that balanced couples adopt in their relationship, positive violations will be more noticed than negative violations. Therefore, more attention to positive violations than negative violations leads to a more affective interaction. In contrast, the narrow bandwidth of unbalanced couples makes it more likely that the couple behave in ways qualified as violations. Because unbalanced couples tend to highlight or ignore cultural differences idiosyncratically, there is a high probability that negative violations may catch their attention more than positive violations. These negative violations lead to a negative, unstable pattern of marital interaction.

We speculate that balanced and unbalanced intercultural couples also differ in the attributions that they attach to the other partner's positive or negative behaviors. Gottman (1994) summarizes some studies in marital attribution as follows: "Nondistressed couples engaged in relationship-enhancing attributions, whereas distressed couples engaged in distress-maintaining attributions. Distress-maintaining attributions maximized the impact of negativity of the partner's behavior and minimized the impact of the positivity of the partner's behavior. Relationship-enhancing attributions minimized the impact of negative and maximized the impact of positive behaviors of the partner" (p. 349). Gottman (1994) also refers to research which have found that distressed couples tend to attribute their partner's negative behavior to internal factors and positive behavior to external situational factors whereas the opposite is true with nondistressed couples. Also, many social psychology experiments (Kretch & Crutchfield, 1948; Simpson & Yinger, 1958) have confirmed that differences are maximized and prejudice increases in the face of stress.

Putting together the differential attributional activity and the degree of balance and complexity with which cultural differences are resolved, we draw inferences as follows about the nature of attribution in intercultural marriages regarding a partner's behaviors and cultural differences. Unbalanced intercultural couples tend to attribute their partner's negative behavior to prejudiced cultural stereotypes about the partner and these stereotypes may be seen as internal traits of the partner (e.g., "Latinos are womanizers that's why he flirted with that woman" or "She's just like the other dominant white women"). Thus, the partner's positive behaviors will either be ignored or attributed to fleeting, situational factors (e.g., "He's being nice today because he just wants something from me." Or, "She cooked a nice meal because her friends are coming over.")

On the contrary, balanced intercultural couples tend to ignore or attribute their partner's negative behaviors to external, fleeting, situational factors (e.g. "He did not ask how my day was. Something bad must have happened at work." Or, "She's in a bad mood, she must not be feeling well.") In addition, the partner's positive behaviors are attributed to positive internal traits in the partner and these traits may be related to that partner's positive cultural heritage (e.g. "He said I looked great. He's really very expressive. I guess Italians are brought up that way." Or, "She told me directly what I was doing wrong. She's really honest. That's what good about Americans.")

Gottman (1994) concludes from the marital attribution studies which he cited that "once established, these attributional sets make change less likely to occur. Behaviors that should disconfirm the attributional sets tend to get ignored, whereas behaviors that confirm the attributional set receive attention" (p. 350). We infer from the above conclusion that behaviors which qualified as expectancy violations at the early stage of a

marriage would fail to divert attention in later stages of intercultural marriages and become only expectancy confirmations where attributional sets are already established. Confirmations in this case may only draw out the relational messages that balanced and unbalanced couples established in their marriage. Behavior that positively violates expectations would reinforce the positive attributions of balanced couples while it may not have an effect on the unbalanced couple whose attributional sets tell them to ignore positive behavior. On the other hand, behaviors that negatively violate established expectancies may only draw out the relational implicature of the action such that unbalanced couples automatically attribute it to the negative traits of their partners and balanced couples may just ignore it. Therefore, we predict that positive and stable interaction patterns and attributional sets established in the balanced intercultural couple lead to stable and affective marriage relationship while the negative, unstable interaction patterns and attributional sets established in the unbalanced intercultural couple lead to either divorce or a dysfunctional stable relationship.

The above are just rough and general speculations and there may be gender and other differences that regulate the attributions that unbalanced and balanced intercultural couples make about their spouses' behaviors. Also, the general outline above assumes that more or less rigid patterns of interaction and attributions develop in marriages over time. However, this may not always be the case. Therefore, it would be interesting to identify what sort of violations would override established patterns of marital interaction and attributional sets in fairly stable marriages. It would also be interesting to look at other mechanisms by which cultural differences in intercultural couples are brought forth into the foreground or pushed back into the background of the relationship.

Conclusion

The study of intercultural marriages, just like the study of any other close relationship, faces the same problems of linking preinteractional factors to dynamic interaction patterns and further, to relational outcomes. Since, it is impossible to account for all factors and processes in a phenomenon especially when the relationship is embedded in complex social networks, the problem appears more obvious when one has to consider cultural differences in the intimate relationship. How to account for the dynamic communicative interaction within intimate relationships without detaching it from its social moorings remains a challenge. Nevertheless, we believe that we are able to include some antecedent factors, processes, outcomes, as well as some relevant contexts to offer a general outline for further study of intercultural marriages in communication.

We suggest that further study describe the expectations specific to one culture and how these interact with expectations specific to another culture, within the context of intercultural marriages. Furthermore, it would be important to study the relational messages and behaviors drawn out by these expectations. We also suggest that further studies of intercultural marriages look at the relationship between the couple's degree of identification to their respective cultures and their marital satisfaction. We speculate a curvilinear relationship between degree of identification to one's culture (arrayed from rejection to total identification) and marital satisfaction (low to high). In addition, future research needs to examine how the factors particular in couple's different cultural background affect relational discrepancies and perceived fulfillment of couple's expectancy that contributes to marital satisfaction.

Despite the increase in intercultural marriages in the U.S., it constitutes only about 3% of all marriages in the U.S. (Gaines & Ickes, 1997). However, more studies of these uncommon marriages are needed to contribute to the deeper understanding about communication and interaction in close relationships in the context of cultural diversity.

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